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ABSTRACT

If "scholarly activity" is considered broadly to include more than traditional, knowledge-producing research, then forensics qualifies as scholarly activity. This point of view is reflected in the tenure, promotion, and evaluation criteria at Morehead State University (Kentucky), where the work of faculty members is divided into three categories: teaching, service, and professional achievement. Professional achievement, in turn, consists of knowledge-producing research, professional accomplishments, and activities which contribute to professional growth. The second of these categories, which refers to practicing the profession, allows for using forensics performance to meet the professional achievement requirement. From an administrative standpoint, the challenge of considering forensics in this way is the challenge of evaluating the forensics activities in which faculty members participate. Administrators would benefit if forensics practitioners and administrators could develop some consensus about the guidelines which should be used to evaluate the forensics work of faculty members. (PRA)

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"Forensics As Scholarly Activity From the Administrative Perspective."

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Abstract

If "scholarly activity" is considered broadly to include more than traditional, knowledge producing-research, then I believe that forensics qualifies as scholarly activity. From an administrative standpoint, the challenge of considering forensics in this way is the challenge of evaluating the forensics activities in which faculty members participate.

In order to answer the question "Is forensics scholarly activity?" it is important to define what we mean by "scholarly activity." Clearly it is more than whatever a scholar happens to do. It is also more than teaching, which is the process of passing on the results of scholarship. It is also more than service, which is using the scholar's expertise to give assistance to others, at the college, university, community, regional, or national level.

Some people interpret "scholarly activity" narrowly to mean "research which contributes to knowledge in a discipline or field." This type of research can take many forms, including historical investigation, critical inquiry, hypothesis testing, and theory building. These various forms of research are the essential activities of the scholar, who uses them to manage the body of knowledge which forms the core of his or her field. This body of knowledge can be thought of as a group of theories and statements, or as the combined and integrated set of answers which scholars develop in response to the questions they find important. Faculty members who define their primary work in this way, follow what Ernest Boyer calls the German model of the professoriate.[1]

Is forensics "scholarly activity" according to this narrow definition of research? In many cases, no. It is true that people who engage in forensics need research skills. They need to navigate libraries, find sources, and locate pieces of information. They need to be able to answer questions as any researcher does. However, the point of their research is not generally to contribute to knowledge in the field of forensics. For instance, forensics practitioners and coaches ask questions like "What piece of literature would work well for oral interp?" "What would make a strong introduction for a speech?" and "Where can I find a powerful quote, analogy, anecdote, etc.?" These are questions which assume and follow

from a set of principles about how to achieve effectiveness or eloquence in some specific genre of performance. The forensics researcher is not in most cases asking questions about those principles in order to corroborate them, modify them, or reject them. In other words, the performer or coach who researches is not in these cases trying to create knowledge about the field of forensics, but is trying to put that knowledge into practice.

I say "in many cases," because some forensics practitioners do create speeches or interp pieces which add to knowledge in the field by changing how people think about forensics or changing the way they do forensics. In such cases, the scholar's work has the same effect as knowledge-producing research. It changes the body of knowledge in a field; and therefore it is from a functional viewpoint knowledge-producing or epistemic research. It is also true that scholars carry out research about about the field of forensics in the traditional way. For instance, our speech coach wrote her masters thesis about the effectiveness of various coaching styles. In so doing, she drew on research in management theory and organizational communication for the purpose of altering what we know about effective coaching. Others have written articles which demonstrate methods of analysis, for instance, thereby adding to knowledge in the forensics field.

I think that the conclusions I've just drawn are the conclusions an administrator typically would draw if he or she were using the phrase "scholarly activity" in the narrowest sense. However, administrators by no means agree that all scholarly work should fit this narrow definition of "scholarly activity." In fact, many administrators and institutions prefer a broader view of scholarship, and consequently label this category of work differently.

In 1973, the Commission on Academic Tenure in Higher Education, sponsored by the Association of American Colleges and the American Association of University Professors published a set of recommendations concerning academic tenure. In reference to the need for scholarship, this committee wrote, "Every member of the academic profession must have scholarly, research, or creative ability, in some degree, if knowledge is to

progress and if instruction is not to become merely the transmission of accepted doctrine or technique." The commission then noted that "In fields such as the drama, creative writing, and musical composition, where modes of 'publication' are essentially different from those in other disciplines, appropriate differential standards for judging the practitioner's qualifications are inherently difficult to develop, and the attempt is frequently not made. Probationary faculty in these fields often feel themselves at a severe disadvantage, believing that members of personnel committees drawn from other disciplines apply largely irrelevant criteria to their work. Similar problems arise in such fields as nursing and social work, architecture and engineering, where professional performance is crucial." [2] Here we have a statement written under AAUP sponsorship which recognizes creative activity within a profession as an alternative to publication.

This point of view is reflected in the tenure, promotion, and evaluation criteria at my institution, Morehead State, where the work of faculty members is divided into 3 categories: teaching, service, and professional achievement. The third category of "professional achievement" consists of three kinds of activities: (1) knowledge-producing research, measured in terms of publications and presentations. Incidentally, this subheading is labeled "scholarly activity" in our tenure and promotion policy; (2) professional accomplishments, or successful attempts to practice one's profession. Creative activities are specifically mentioned here; and (3) activities which contribute to professional growth.

The second of these categories, which refers to practicing one's profession, allows for using forensics performance to meet the professional achievement requirement. It is interesting to note that since departmental and university policies simply list these three subcategories and do not specify that faculty members must present work in any one of them, forensics work alone could satisfy the professional achievement requirement.

This may seem to be an overly broad or overly generous view of what may count as the work of a scholar. However, it is consistent with practice in other fields, for instance, mass communication.

A recent survey of journalism and mass communication schools revealed that 92% of them have tenure criteria which allow for the consideration of creative activities.[3] Examples of typical creative activities are production of radio or television programs, newspaper and magazine articles, and popular books. For our purposes it is important to note that these creative activities represent ways people practice the professions of broadcasting and print journalism.

In 1979 Stone and Norton found that journalism administrators are inclined to think about scholarly activity in journalism as encompassing two approaches: teaching/service, and teaching/research. Furthermore, in 1986, the Radio Television News Directors Association proposed that "outstanding professional activity be considered an alternative criterion to scholarly research and publication." The Radio Television News Directors Association also proposed establishing a "separate professional tenure track" available to faculty who would prefer this option. These examples demonstrate that our counterparts in mass communication recognize "practicing one's profession" to be as a legitimate form of work for the purpose of tenure review, and an alternative to traditional publication-oriented research.[4]

Interestingly, the Radio Television News Directors Association placed one clear requirement on professional practice. They emphasized that professional work be innovative or original. For instance, they specifically referred to "broadcast of 'exceptionally meritorious' stories, programs and commentaries," original productions that "advance the state of the art and break new ground," "meritorious work of a demanding nature in professional positions with the media during summers or leaves," and publication of books which "break new ground and successfully advance concepts, ideas and

approaches that transcend ordinary instructional material."[5] This emphasis is consistent with the statements by the AAUP Commission which I have quoted above.

I agree with the view that professional accomplishments which advance an entire profession have more scholarly value than those which do not. After all, an important role, though not the only role, of the scholar is to serve as guardian or caretaker of his or her field. And I think that this caretaker role applies to forensics as well as other fields.

What, then, is the administrative point of view toward forensics as scholarly activity? For one thing, administrators do not speak with one voice. I think that some administrators would clearly not consider forensics, in the form of performance or coaching, to be a kind of scholarly activity. But some of us, especially in departments which emphasize professional training in journalism, radio-television, and theatre, for instance, would surely consider forensics to be legitimate scholarly work; though we might prefer to label it in a more general way as "professional achievement" rather than "scholarly activity."

I do believe that the administrator who takes this viewpoint faces an important challenge; and that is the challenge of evaluating forensics work. Some questions which illustrate that challenge are: How do administrators who may have no forensics background evaluate the quality of a performance? When a faculty member creates and performs a piece, should subsequent performances of that piece also be counted as scholarly activity, or do they then count as service? Should publications count for more than creative productions? How should forensics coaching be evaluated? Does a winning record count as professional accomplishment? Should creative activities in forensics which break new ground or advance the entire field in some way count for more than other activities, as they do in other fields? How does an administrator identify which activities break new ground or advance the field in some way?

If "scholarly activity" is interpreted broadly, which I think is appropriate, given the importance of professional accomplishment in the field of communication, then forensics is scholarly activity. The questions which concern me as an administrator have to do with the

process of evaluating forensics as scholarly activity. Administrators would benefit if forensics practitioners and administrators could develop some consensus about the guidelines which should be used to evaluate the forensics work of faculty members.

[1] Ernest L. Boyer, College: The Undergraduate Experience in America, Harper & Row, 1987, p. 120.

[2] Commission on Academic Tenure in Higher Education, Faculty Tenure: A Report and Recommendations, Jossey-Bass, 1973, p. 39.

[3] Frederic Leigh, "Creative activities gain acceptance in tenure process," Journalism Educator, 43, Summer 1988, p. 69.

[4] Leigh, p. 68.

[5] Leigh, p. 69.